

2020 APAAC Annual Legal Assistant Virtual Conference

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VULNERABLE ADULT CRIME VICTIMS: PERSPECTIVES & SUPPORT

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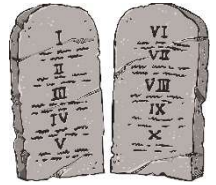
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ELIZABETH BURTON ORTIZ

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

10 Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities

[adapted from the award-winning training video]



- I. **Always Speak directly to the person** (including when interpreters are present). Do not speak to a person's companion or a service provider.
- II. **Offer to shake hands.** Always use the same good manners when interacting with a person with a disability as you would with anyone else.
- III. **Identify yourself when speaking to a person who is blind.** Always announce when entering and/or leaving the room.
- IV. **Wait for a response and instructions when offering assistance.** Always wait until an individual accepts your offer, then listen to the instructions or ask for suggestions.
- V. **Treat adults as adults.** Always be courteous. Don't patronize or assume familiarity with someone you don't know well by touching.
- VI. **Do not hang or lean on a person's wheelchair.** A wheelchair is "assistive technology" or a "mobility aid" (not furniture). People use wheelchairs to increase their mobility and independence.
- VII. **Listen attentively and never pretend to understand.** If a person speaks in a manner that is difficult for you to understand, be patient. Listen carefully and wait for her/him to finish. Clarify what the person said – reflect what you heard and let the individual respond. Ask short questions that can be answered by a "yes" or "no" (or a nod or shake of the head). Note: Someone who does not speak is "nonverbal" or "without speech" – not "mute."
- VIII. **Speak to people at eye level.** When interacting for a period of time with someone using a wheelchair, sit down so you can be at eye level. This helps the individual feel included as an equal in the conversation – and avoids neck strain!
- IX. **Wave your hand or tap a person who is deaf on the shoulder.** Once you have the person's attention, speak in regular tone (don't shout). Keep objects away from your mouth so the person can read your lips.
- X. **RELAX!** The most important thing to remember when interacting with people with disabilities is to BE YOURSELF. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions that seem to relate to disability (e.g., walk, see). When you're not sure what to do or which language to use in a situation, simply be honest and open with the individual. When in doubt, just ask!